CLAIMS

1. A method of electronic payment for data transferred across a computer network containing at least one client, at least one server and at least one router which forwards data, the method comprising the steps of:

sending an electronic data request from a client to a server via one or more routers; and

sending electronic data from said server to said client via one or more routers in response to said electronic data request, said electronic data having associated with it a data field containing a value which represents [the] a commercial value of [the data contained within] the electronic data.

2. [A] The method according to Claim [1] 1, in which the electronic data is transmitted in the form of packets.

3. [A] The method according to Claim 2, wherein each of said one or more routers receives an incoming data packet, [reads the value in the] containing electronic data and a data field associated with the electronic data in the incoming data packet, reads the value in the data field, calculates a new value based on the read value and the cost of forwarding the data packet, and forwards the data packet with the new value in the associated data field.

4. [A] The method according to Claim 3, wherein each of said one or more routers checks whether the value in the data field associated with the electronic data in the incoming data packet falls within predefined parameters and rejects the packet if the value falls outside the predefined parameters.

5. [A] The method according to [any preceding Claim,] Claim 1, wherein the electronic data request has associated with it a data field containing a [value] value, which represents the commercial value of the data contained within the electronic data request.

6. [A] The method according to [any preceding Claim,] Claim 1, wherein total accumulated values for transactions between routers or between routers and servers/clients are recorded.

7. [A] The method according to Claim 6, wherein clearance payments are made between the operators and/or users of the routers and servers/clients, the clearance payments corresponding to the total accumulated values.

8. A system of electronic payment for data based on a hardware infrastructure of linked routers, data providers and data users, comprising:

at least one client;

at least one server for providing electronic data in the form of data packets in response to a request from a client and having [its] the at least one server's operation governed by a server protocol which causes each data packet sent by the server to have associated with it a data field representing the value of the data contained within the packet;

at least one router linked by a hardware infrastructure to said server and said client and having its operation governed by a routing table and a router protocol; and

whereby the router protocol causes each router to add commercial value to the packet by forwarding it in accordance with the routing table and to update the value contained in the data field within the packet to reflect this added commercial value.

9. [A] The system according to Claim 8, wherein the router protocol also includes procedures for rejecting individual packets in accordance with pre-defined parameters related to the value of each packet on receipt.

10. A method of electronic payment for data transferred across a computer network containing at least one client, at least one server and at least one part of the [network] network, which forwards data, the method comprising the steps of:

sending an electronic data request from a client to a server via the part of the network; and

sending electronic data from said server to said client via the part of the network in response to said electronic data request, said electronic data having associated with it a data field containing a value which represents the commercial value of the data contained within the electronic data.

11. [A] The method according to Claim [10] 10, in which the electronic data is transmitted in the form of packets.

12. [A] The method according to Claim 11, wherein the part of the network has an associated data processor which reads the value in the data field associated with an incoming data packet received by the part of the network, calculates a new value based on the read value and the cost of forwarding the data packet, and forwards the data packet with the new value in the associated data field.

13. [A] The method according to Claim 12, wherein the data processor checks whether the value in the data field associated with the incoming data packet falls within predefined parameters and rejects the packet if the value falls outside the predefined parameters.

14. A method of electronic payment for requested data transferred across a computer network containing at least one client, at least one server and at least one router which forwards data, in which the requested data is sent from said server to said client in the form of a packet, wherein said packet comprises a packet header and packet data,
the packet data containing the requested data, and

the packet header containing one or more address fields containing address information relating to the client and/or server and a data field containing a value which represents the commercial value of the requested data contained within the packet data.

15. [A] The method according to Claim 14, wherein the data is sent via the router which reads the value in the data field of the incoming data packet received by the router, calculates a new value based on the read value and the cost of forwarding the data packet, writes the new value to the data field, and forwards the data packet with the new value in the data field.